

A CRITIQUE OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

"No analysis of the parts and no mere addition of the analyses and abstractions will ever give any insight into the pattern or purposive configuration that endows

them with special significance; indeed, this organic relationship will not even be suspected when methods of abstraction and isolation are the sole ones employed."

—Lewis Mumford.

It is difficult to select a satisfactory brief statement of the M.C.H. from the extensive writings of Marx and Engels. As good a summary as any is Engels' view that of all the factors determining historical development "the decisive element is pre-eminently the production and reproduction of life and its material requirements." (*Origin of the Family*).

Complement to Idealism

The M.C.H. is essentially the *complement* to idealism rather than its opposite. It is comparable to the working-class movement which struggles with the capitalist class but perpetuates classes. The M.C.H. struggles with idealism, but perpetuates its fundamental error of separating ideas from material conditions. Since this is the kernel of my criticism, I must first document the charge:

"the ideal is nothing other than the material world reflected by the human mind" (*Capital*, vol. I, p. 25 Kerr).

"our materialist view . . . does not explain practice in terms of the idea, but explains the formation of the idea in terms of practice" (*German Ideology*, p. 28).

"the dialectic in our heads is only the reflection of the actual development which is fulfilled in the world of nature and of human history" (*Selected Correspondence*, p. 495).

These, and similar statements, make it clear

that we are being asked to accept the separation (although only, it is claimed, for the purpose of analysis) of ideas from the material world. In fairness to Marx and Engels, it should be noted that there are also passages which appear to be attempts to replace the isolates whence they were abstracted. For example:

"In nature, nothing takes place in isolation. Every thing affects every other thing and vice versa" (*Anti-Duhring*, p. 91).

The word 'interaction' appears fairly often in their works—the word 'integration' never, to my knowledge. The former emphasises *parts*, the latter the *whole*. My contention is that both idealism and historical materialism are attempts to separate the parts from an indivisible whole *in order to study those parts as if their sum were the same as the whole*. Idealism says ideas are the basis, the M.C.H. says the material world is the basis. There can be no objection to using the terms 'ideas' and 'material world' to connote different aspects of society. The objection is to supposing that the one has any meaning except in relation to the other, or that one necessarily is basic, or real (in the sense that the other is a mere reflection of it), or the determinant of history, even ultimately.

The basis of society is the mode of production, say our exponents of the M.C.H. The mode is defined as the productive forces

together with the productive relations. Now, the concept of a basis implies a correlative concept of a superstructure, i.e. that which, added to the basis, forms the whole—in this case, the whole of society. (It is sometimes held that the mode of production itself is divisible into basic forces and superstructural relations, thus positing successive layers upon the basis, each more basic than the next. This does not materially affect the main argument.)

If we accept, for the moment, that society can be divided into basis and superstructure, it is pertinent to ask what constitutes the claim of any given factor to be included in either category. Why, in short, is the mode of production basic? I have heard the following answers: because life is impossible without it; because it is the most permanent and stable feature of society; because it is linked directly and indirectly with every other factor, and because it lends itself best to scientific examination.

One-sided Approach

These are no doubt very good reasons for stressing the necessity of understanding the mode of production (analysed statically) of any epoch. But they are *not* reasons for asserting its primacy over other ingredients of society, e.g. ideas. Human life is equally impossible without ideas, and their permanency, relativity and accessibility to study are equally demonstrable.

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There is, however, an even more cogent objection to calling the mode of production the basis. It implies that ideas are not in the hand. Yet the definition of mode of production is "productive forces + relations". Assuming that we all agree that forces and relations are reciprocal and therefore constitute a unity, I await to be told how there can be productive relations without ideas and, by extension, how there can be a mode of production without ideas.

The question arises: why should such a theory as the M.C.H. ever have been propounded? I suggest that, in addition to being an antidote to idealism, it seeks to explain, in the light of past changes in society, the next change to Socialism. The theory of expanding forces of production and constricting relationships is intended to demonstrate the necessity and inevitability (not necessarily in the mechanical sense of Socialism. Turning to the S.P.G.B. interpretation of the M.C.H., we find the following in *Socialism* (pamphlet no. 9):

"The very ideas current among us take their shape from the property basis of society, for the possessors view all things from the standpoint of property owners; and even the revolutionary idea, inasmuch as it is reaction against the present form of society, arises, finally, from that property condition" (p. 31).

and

"The substitution of this new property condition for the old one will abolish the existing basis of the social system and provide a new one. This is what we call the social revolution. It results in a revolution of the social structure—a complete change from top to bottom" (p. 34, my italics).

On the face of it, the first quotation is reasonable, and seems to be saying little more than "you can't get the idea of abolishing property unless there is property". But see where it leads in the second one: since property is the basis, the "revolution" is a new property condition! The "revolutionary idea" is thus conceived to the no more than an attempt to alter its own basis, to shape when its own function is allegedly to be shaped. By such reasoning do our socialist eyes fail to see beyond our M.C.H. nose.

False Separation

In an article on the M.C.H. (S.S., May, 1947) Gilmac wrote that "according to this theory ideas are the product of conditions, and not the other way round." Later in the same article, however, it was the other way round: "social progress is the result of the mental activity of man exerting itself on the

material provided by the external environment". Here we can see clearly how the unfortunate separation of mental activity from material conditions leads to a contradictory position. It may be resolved either by dropping "and not the other way round" (i.e. acknowledging the reciprocal action of ideas and material conditions)—or by integrating the two factors in a functional whole.

URGENT!

TO ALL BRANCHES AND MEMBERS!

Next month, the Party will be publishing a special anniversary edition of "The Socialist Standard", to commemorate its birth some fifty years ago.

All the signs at present indicate that this will be a great occasion in the history of the organisation, but its success will not be assured without the active co-operation of as many of you as possible.

The editorial committee are playing their part, so are the writers, the cover designers, artists and publicity committee. An appeal for funds has gone out and we hope that this succeeds of course, but there is still something more.

Let us determine that we are going to raise the circulation of our journal for all we are worth. This occasion could be the opportunity for getting the S.S. into a great many more homes and for stepping up permanent sales by at least 50%. If your branch has not yet commenced canvassing, raise the item as a matter of importance at the next business meeting. See that a canvassing organiser or committee is appointed to co-ordinate efforts and inaugurate an intensive drive for September.

The H.O. literature canvassing committee will be delighted to send a member along to give practical assistance and advice to London branches, and will do their utmost to help provincial branches by post. Don't let this golden chance slip through the Party's fingers. SET TO WORK WITHOUT DELAY! Enquiries and requests for help should be addressed to: The Literature Canvassing Committee,

c/o 46, Balfour Road,
Ealing, W.13.

I hold that the latter is the more fruitful position to adopt—mainly because the former leads to so many wrongly stated questions, such as "which factor is basic, decisive or indispensable?" Evans neatly summed up the

main drawback of the "factor" view in FORUM (Aug. 1953): "our materialism remains still suborned to the idealism of a single, sudden, separate political act." Also a result of the M.C.H. is the omnipotent role assigned to one factor in history. Thus, Waters, in a paragraph on the M.C.H., wrote:

"If we isolate the technological aspect of man's history we can see how he has progressively extended his control over nature by invention and the discovery of more efficient tools and processes. Furthermore, we shall see how this aspect has been the foundation of all other human activities, determining their condition and defining their limits." (S.S. Jan. 1954, my italics)

We must assume that the Ed. Comm., having read and approved this passage, also takes the view that the technological aspect has been the foundation of all other human activities. The absurdity of this view illustrates the folly of isolating parts from a whole, thus destroying their organic unity.

Relative Validity

The examples I have quoted of applications of the M.C.H. show that the theory itself possesses only relative validity, and is by no means the "Open Sesame" to an understanding of society. What, then, is the extent of its validity? As a theory that material conditions are the determinants of history we may integrate it with another Marxian theory that man has not yet made truly human history.

History reveals no society which has gained a consciousness of the mechanics and dynamics of its institutions sufficient to prevent their operation to undesired ends. But it would be foolish to extend this to saying that man is as impotent as ever he was to control the forces of society. Mankind is, sociologically speaking, on the brink of achieving—in Socialism—the largest measure yet of such control. From this we see that the Marxian "production of the immediate material means of subsistence" is at all times a factor in society—but less a limiting one in Socialism than in Savagery. This is but another way of asserting that there is progress in man's conscious control over his conditions of existence.

A member once described Socialism as "Capitalism without its contradictions". This desire to avoid thinking about Socialism as a new way of living seems to be a typical result (or cause?) of the M.C.H., which arose from the need to meet the defenders of Capitalism on their own grounds. The socialist idea, being only partially free from the errors of the old capitalist one, at first offers them the tribute of inverted perpetuation. Thus, for example, our old attitude to

violence stems from what *they* might do, instead of from what *we* want to do. Similarly, the M.C.H. is the reason for Socialism in *their* language. "This last class to achieve its emancipation", etc., is for us to learn a few historical lessons from how it was done last time—only the trouble is IT wasn't done last time.

Socialist Revolution

The Socialism we want is compounded of ideas and potentially realisable material conditions. Our dilemma is that we are not afraid of ideas becoming *more like Socialism*—indeed, we are keenly desirous of propagating them—but our M.C.H. outlook forbids us to acknowledge that *material conditions* (on which these ideas are allegedly based) can become more like Socialism prior to the political dominance of the socialist idea. It is inconceivable to me that the socialist idea

will grow without a correlative development of material conditions approximating closer to Socialism—for it is only in thought that man and environment can be separated.

The proper place for human agency in the M.C.H. scheme of things has long troubled its advocates. Those who have Communist Party sympathies usually deny the ability of the mass of people to institute intelligent action ("they must be led"), while the S.P.G.B. traditionally denies that capitalist institutions can be modified prior to the revolutionary act ("they must be dispossessed"). A more reasonable attitude—and one which, I believe, many members are giving favourable consideration—is that socialist ideas, and actions resulting from and causing those ideas, constitute a socialist movement whose acceleration will be the Socialist Revolution.

S.R.P.

SOCIAL INSTINCT

Frank Evans, in his February, 1953, article in FORUM, refers at some length to various aspects of the gregarious nature of man. He says: "The physical apparatus of sociality are the sympathetic mechanism, the imitative faculty and suggestibility." He also speaks of the "social instinct" as being "paramount".

Now there is certainly a most important truth in this. If we treat human being as isolated individuals, we shall go much further wrong than we shall if we treat them as members of a herd. The herd qualities of man shout aloud, as Evans rightly points out, in every sphere of his activity.

There are also ways, however, in which men behave in ways very unlike those of a herd. Let us look a little closer at some of these terms that Evans uses.

Needs and Demands

If there is one thing that one can say about an instinct, it is that it is pretty well invariable in its operation. Faced with a red shape of a certain size, a female bird at the chick-rearing stage will endeavour to push food into it. It is not true that, faced with this stimulus, one will react according to plan and another will not, or even that the majority will and a minority will not: the instinct operates in all equally. As the book says: "An instinct is an elaborate pattern of successive

reflexes, which occurs as a whole in response to certain stimuli" (*Penguin Dictionary of Biology*). If this is so, and I see no reason to question the formulation, MANKIND HAS NO INSTINCTS WHATSOEVER. It is possible to put this the other way round, of course, as William James did, and say that men have so many instincts that they cancel each other out (Margaret Knight, *William James*, p. 158), but this comes to the same thing in the end. Either way, there is no question of a "social instinct" (or any other instinct) operating as a determining factor in man's existence.

If we posit any of these things, and even if we drop the word "instinct" and insert instead the word "drive" or "fundamental need", we place something rigid and fixed at the base of man's activity. Not only is it something rigid and fixed, which determines without being determined; it is also something unexplained, and indeed inexplicable. To say that something is done "instinctively" (certainly as applied to human beings) is to say that we really cannot explain it. Abram Kardiner says of instincts: "We assume that they are present, and once we make that assumption, we tend to blame the behaviour on the instinct. Behaviour can be observed; instinct cannot. One can draw conclusions about behaviour; about instinct one can only philosophise" (*The Individual and His Society*, p. 62).

If instincts are unexaminable, like God, then also, like God, they cannot be changed. They will continually give rise to the same needs and demands, or needs and demands which, though apparently quite different, are "derived" from the basic drive, and are therefore "the same" in real substance. This is not, however, the case, as Krech and Crutchfield point out: "The number and kind of man's needs and demands are not permanently established but are, on the contrary, constantly subject to change. As new tensions arise, new needs and demands may appear, old ones may disappear, and these new needs and demands do not derive their present driving power from prior needs and demands out of which they developed" (*Theory and Problems of Social Psychology*, p. 45).

This view is a relatively recent one in modern psychology, and has only reached adequate formulation since the more intensive development of social psychology. It is, however, a view which is clearly right in line with Socialist views on the matter. It is well stated in J. A. C. Brown's new Pelican, *The Social Psychology of Industry*, more particularly in pp. 46-51. As he says there: "The modern view is that human behaviour cannot be understood purely in terms of the satisfaction or frustration of biological drives, because social life generates new needs which may be as powerful or even more powerful than the original biological ones."

This is not to say that human nature is infinitely changeable. As Evans well insisted in his November, 1952, article: "The equating of human nature with human conduct—the view, that is, that environment is the sole determinant of human capacities, is a political weapon of the Communist, not of the Socialist. It is the official cult of Russia, whose academicians teach that there are no natural boundaries to the behaviour of wheat, cows, or men, that man is what the State enjoins."

The Basic Law

But if man has no instincts, and no fixed needs, what, it may be asked, are the basic laws of his existence and activity? There is only one, and it is very simple: RESISTANCE TO LIMITATION.

Of course, stated in its simplest form, like this, there is nothing specific to man—or even to life—about it. Philosophically-minded readers will remember that as long ago as 1677 Spinoza was saying: "The effort by which each thing endeavours to persist in its own being is nothing else but the actual essence of the thing itself." More recently,

E. S. Russell put it in a more determinate form as applied to animals, stating: "If in a living animal normal structural and functional relations, either external or internal, are disturbed, activities will usually be set in train that are directive towards restoring structural and functional norms, or establishing new norms which are adapted to the altered circumstances" (*The Directiveness of Organic Activities*, p. 44).

When we come to man, of course, we have to bring in psychological and social considerations. Krech and Crutchfield have a good formulation: "Instabilities in the psychological field produce 'tensions' whose effects on perception, cognition and action are such as to change the field in the direction of a more stable structure". We can still see the use of referring to our first simple conception, however, by saying that men, like other things, resist limitation, but have found better methods of doing so than the others. "Better" simply means more variable, more complex, more highly controlled and more creative.

Some of these better methods are innate—"an upright posture, opposable thumbs, a pound of brains, extraordinary social sensitivity, acute colour vision, and prolonged post-natal dependence"—among others (to quote Evans again). Other better methods are socially acquired—the use of fire, the wheel, geometry, the steam engine, the integers, electricity, logic and atomic energy, among others. Others again are both innate and

acquired—the family group, social learning and the process of maturation, in particular.

Krech and Crutchfield show clearly how such a general concept can be worked out into the details of daily life and the interpretation of experience; and W. Ross Ashby, in his *Design For A Brain*, shows that it can be reduced to rigorous mathematical terms.

We are here presented, therefore, with a view of human nature which is in complete harmony with Socialist views, which is academically respectable, which has been applied with success to the analysis of a great body of experimental data, and which has a sound mathematical foundation.

Attitude and Ideology

With its help, we are able to see that the term "social instinct" really refers to a set of attitudes carefully instilled by society during the maturation of a child, and mainly during the long period when the child is dependent upon others for survival.

It is precisely because it is an attitude and not an instinct that sociality is so variable. It has to be given and received, and as with other things which have to be given and received, there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. At a time when "everybody" wants a television set, there is always a vocal minority who do not; at a time when "everybody" is war-mad, there are always a few who object; at a time when telling the truth is a social

necessity, there must always be those who will tell lies.

It is this very failure ever to achieve complete conformity that is the strength of human society. Faced with a sudden change in the situation, where existing attitudes will not serve, society can always find an attitude, or set of attitudes, or ideology, to fill the bill. This ideology may have been pushed around unsuccessfully for many years, and its full-time protagonists may have become tired and dispirited. But let the day come when it fits society's needs, and it will blossom like the rose.

It is in this way that the Socialist ideology will be adopted, if it ever is adopted. The reason why we feel it will be adopted is that we see possibilities arising, ever more forcefully and plainly, which will require Socialism for their realisation.

If sociality is an instinct—if "the impulse to accept what others accept, in order to be accepted by them, is the all-powerful mechanism of social survival, the centre of gravity of human mind"—then Socialism is impossible. To regard it as a set of attitudes is to raise once again the question of its possibility, in what seems to be a more hopeful form.

In a further article, I hope to deal with the concept of *suggestibility*, raised by Evans in the same article.

J. C. ROWAN.

THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

7 — *The Socialist Movement*

The main propositions contained in these articles are that Socialist society is not "established" by a single act (what we speak of as the legislative act of revolution by the delegates of a class-conscious working class), but evolves; that the phrases "revolutionary act" or "establishment of Socialism" are to be understood as convenient verbal summaries of social processes in prospect (as past "revolutions" are summaries of social changes in retrospect); that the essential theoretical background of the Socialist movement is not political strategy but historical materialism;

that the Party's too literal interpretation of the 'political act' means that it still has one foot in Communism which, by undermining its materialism, makes its concept of Socialist society likewise idealist (Anarchist); that the Party therefore remains a compound of Communism and Anarchism, opposing each with the arguments of the other; that the Party nevertheless is a step forward in the evolution of the Socialist movement (concurrently with the evolution of Socialist society) because, first, it has a more complete grasp of capitalist economy, and because, secondly, it is con-

cerned not solely with productivity, value, *quantity* (the pre-occupation of Communism), but also with the *quality* of human labour ('art') and human relations ('equality'); that the more coherently Socialist movement which must develop as the ideological counterpart of Socialism evolving may therefore conceivably develop within the Party (provided, I think, we maintain channels, responsibly use and responsibly edited, for free discussion without penalty); that in proportion as it is grasped that what we call the Socialist movement is in fact only the ideological counterpart

of a social process, in the same proportion will it be seen that this ideological movement is essentially cultural and only incidentally political; that, accordingly, the militant proletarianising propaganda as we at present understand it will become more and more subordinate to clarification of the socialist foetus developing within capitalism, *prognosticating* Socialism (the criterion of science) and developing a philosophy of society (of man, of history) which permits anticipation of the Socialist outcome of current social process, and by anticipating to precipitate it.

The change in practical Party activity which would accompany such a change in outlook must be left for the moment, until the "Socialism evolving" has been more concretely pin-pointed. But before even that, let it first be recalled, for those who have waded through these brief and mutilated penny numbers, that each has been an essay on materialism. For the weakness of the Socialist movement at present is its inadequate sense of social evolution.

Evolution

All forms of evolution (and all kinds of growth or development) consist of successive unifications (integrations) of continuously accumulating differentiations. The continuous resolving into integers, of parts differentiated or separated, as these accumulate, is the essence of evolution (inorganic, organic, and social) and of individual growth. The integration is the emergence of quality out of quantity. For instance, the separate digits 1 to 9 are each different, but add one more to and you suddenly come back to one again, on another level, which the Arabs showed by writing 10 as 1 in a higher place (the base ten being of course conventional). Similarly, 100 is a unit, one thing, one hundred. So is a light-year, a man, a universe. So are walking, talking, writing and potting the red: each is a number of different things integrated, reduced to an integer; and each is an integration of integrations, at successive levels, the integrations at lower levels being the integers which are in turn integrated into higher units. And it should be noted that integration is the necessary outcome of accumulation of digits: co-ordination is compelled by plurality of parts; quality is the outcome of quantity. All differences, in the end, are differences of magnitude—whether of atoms, organisms or societies, of evolution or of individual growth.

The infant accumulates sensations. Development of skills (crawling, talking) is the integration of accumulated component dexterities into minor skills, whose accumulation coagulates into major skills, at successive levels.

In this succession, as every teacher or student knows, the rising curve of progress is not continuous, but is punctuated by flat (latency) periods. "plateaus" on the upward curve, followed by another upward sweep of new progress, another plateau. A shorthand student reaches a speed of 60 words a minute by smooth progress, then sticks. Then suddenly 70 and 80, then stick. The reason for these halts is that the components of a given level of skill do not necessarily develop at the same rate. Up to 60, increasing knowledge of the shorthand rules is enough to ensure steadily increasing speed; then the hand has to develop certain rhythmic habits before 70 or 80 is possible; for 90, the ear has to learn to register what is being said while the hand copes with what was said several words earlier; and for high speeds these earlier skills have to combine with others (wider vocabulary, etc.). At each stage the new quality of skill awaits the appropriate accumulation of component lesser skills: it is nothing but the right sum. Each new "quality" of performance is an integer, a one in the tens place, sprung into that place by the addition of 1 to 9.

There are comparable "plateaus" in organic evolution. The bricks of minute individual variations build up to different varieties of a species—life spreads as it were horizontally to every cranny in a given plane. The jumps to different levels of evolution occur when an aggregate of specialisms strikes just the combination appropriate to a radically different mode of existence—a different class of creature emerges, whose species fill every corner of the new plane.

Quantity and Quality

The mode of existence for the species, man, is the social operation of tools. In this (as in all the physical specialisms behind it) he differs only in degree (amount) from bee or beaver or baboon. He has a greater *weight* of brain than the anthropoid, but no additional convolutions; a *greater* uprightness of posture than gorilla or chimp, a *greater* divergence of hand from foot, of male from female, of each from each, and (for each) even of left hand from right. It is from the aggregation (co-ordination) of the quantitative differences that emerges the qualitatively new integer, man. It is, especially, the sum of greater individuality and greater sociality that lifts man in a sense out of the animal kingdom, for it enables him to accumulate tools. This new kind of accumulation (of artefacts) signifies a new kind of evolution (history), for multiplication and integration of the means of labour continuously modifies the mode of co-operation

in labour (society).

The emphasis in these examples is on the continuous resolving of multiplicity into a new simplicity, seen again in the evolution of language "from the complex to the simple": out of verbal accumulation comes both syntactical simplification and the reduction of pictographs to the symbols of mathematics or shorthand. Primitive societies are likewise more complex in relation to their mass; modern society, enormously more massive, has a relatively simple structure. (If the notion shocks, it is a sign that the mass of trees still defies our effort to see the wood, and that, on another plane, we are like those tribes who have no notion of "tree", and no generic word for it, but only a different name for every kind of tree.)

Act of Production

All growth and evolution (inorganic, organic or social) is the continuous resolving of aggregates into integers, where the integration at each level is the sweet bloom of skill, the 'jump' in nature, the 'revolution' in history. And this reduction to a new simplicity is therefore the character also of all those "irreversible enlargements of thought" such (in our time) as we associate with Newton, Darwin, Marx or Einstein: irreversible because they are counterpart of the actual enlargement of social artefacts, and enlargements because they add leagues to our boots by reducing a world to a digit. Hence, also, the common greeting to all discovery is "why, of course, how simple!"

"The first historical act is the act of production itself." Here Marx has stated historical materialism. Here is the integer, the new succinct simplicity, Companion of Honour with law of inverse squares and $E=Mc^2$. But what heavy weather we make of it. To what dialectical indignities do we subject our materialism, dragged by the hair upstairs and down between our Communist and our Anarchist idealism, boxed around the ring with words, seeking the phrase which permits historical materialism to mean the decisive role of the idea, our wisdom foxed by the knowledge that we think!

It is consciousness of deliberation in activity (confirmed and aggravated by our pre-occupation with "conversion" propaganda and the myth of rational man) which leads us to seek the social dynamic anywhere but where it is—in the act of production and the marriage of its progeny. The wheel of history turns—new form of evolution evolves—because the centre of gravity of men's mode of exist-

ence is (eccentrically) ex-centric: production by socially operated means of production out of whose social copulation more means are begotten. At the point of production, our acts are purposeful and predictable, but *history is made behind our labouring backs*, out of the social permutation of a myriad purposes and products. To say that "men make history" is to say nothing unless it means that change in the quality of society issues from accumulation of men's products. Yet it is this we are afraid of, for it offends our status as Creator, possessor of the 'sole dynamic', the Socialist Idea. It touches off

the fear of all children and barbarians and idealists—necessity. It is the fear that labels materialism "mechanical" (for what is the alternative to mechanism but God?) and calls determination "teleology" (!). And it is this fear which renounces the only possibility of making the idea a conscious agent of history, acknowledgement that still the world moves, and that revolution is the summing up of its direction, to be seen for the looking. But the labouring back, bent with consciousness of labour, feels this beckoning tap on the shoulder as the cold touch of a ghost—like one who on a lonesome road doth walk in

fear and dread, and having once looked round walks on and turns no more his head, because he knows a dreadful fiend doth close behind him tread—necessity outside men's wishes!

Socialist theory rises to the level of science, and the Socialist movement to the level of historical agency, when it occupies itself with discerning in the social integration of artefacts the emerging new simplicity which is Socialist society.

F. EVANS

To be continued.

NOTES ON CRISES (2)

I have suggested that crises are highly complex phenomena. As such they are inseparable from the extant social productive relations. They cannot, however, be viewed statically, but always in the light of the changing configuration of class relations and behaviour. That is why no particular crisis is merely a replica of any other. There is no fixed and unalterable pattern to which all crises must conform. Each crisis has a pattern of events peculiar to itself. For that reason we cannot provide a *priori* proof of how a particular crisis will originate or deduce it from mechanical assumptions based upon a given set of facts. Consequently any adequate account of the specific train of events which brings about a particular crisis can only be arrived at after the event.

Again it must be emphasised that a crisis is not the outcome of one factor but many, all of which are intimately connected in some way or other as well as being influenced by the actual circumstances of the time. Thus a set of crisis factors in one situation might diverge from a set of crisis factors in another and dissimilar situation. So although some general propositions can be advanced of the cause of crises it cannot be inferred from these propositions what specific combination of factors will bring about a particular crisis. While there are elements common to all crisis situations, the way these elements will interact in a given situation cannot be known in advance.

This, however, does not prevent us from formulating a number of general propositions which have a crucial bearing on the emergence of crises. To begin with, capitalist production is production for profit and the conversion

of this profit into investment funds for actual or future use (accumulation of capital). It is also true that the volume of investment seeking employment either in the intensifying of old avenues of exploitation or the opening up of new ones is significantly related to the profit expectation which will induce the capitalist to invest. This profit expectation or, to put it more concretely, the anticipated rate of profit, is not a fixed percentage, but may vary fairly widely within certain limits. If, however, it falls outside a certain range, it will constitute a dis-incentive for investors.

Curtailement of Investment

Because in capitalist society a certain set of individuals hold the key positions so far as the decisions for investment are concerned, any acute disappointment with regard to profit expectation will have a decisive bearing on curtailment of investment and hence production. The sharper the anticipated profit fall, the greater, generally speaking, will be the curtailment. To use modern economic idiom such a state of affairs will have a marked dis-equilibrating effect.

Should the curtailment of investment operate in an important industry or group of industries leading to a decline in pay rolls and displacement of workers, it will generate cumulative effects, causing a decline in pay rolls and employment in other spheres. As a result, reduced purchasing power (under-consumption) will emerge as a crisis feature and bring about a deepening of the crisis situation leading perhaps to a general depression. As a corollary of a decline in purchasing power

there comes a slackening off of demand for consumption goods, and the phenomena common to all crises—unsaleable stock.

To say, however, that this type of crisis just sketched was *caused* by a lack of purchasing power or the inability of workers to buy back the wealth they have produced, would certainly be putting the cart before the horse. The contraction of demand for consumption goods resulting in unsaleable stock was not the cause of the crisis starting, but a consequence.

Relative over-production in the form of market surpluses arising from a deficit in purchasing power did not originate the crisis, but was simply one of the facets of the situation which could only reveal itself after the originating factors of the crisis had been set in motion. To put it another way, the under-consumption aspect of crises is the second stage of the crisis situation. This does not mean, however, that as a contributory factor its influence on the whole course of a crisis is negligible. Quite the contrary, under-consumption as an aspect of a crisis can play an active role in intensifying and deepening crisis conditions and also in retarding the return of trade recovery.

It may be asked why investors should not continue to invest even at an abnormally low profit yield rather than as a result of no investment, have "idle money" which earns no profit at all. The somewhat superficial reasons put forward by orthodox economists is that acute profit disappointment has such a psychological impact on entrepreneurs as to change former confidence and buoyancy into lack of confidence and unreasonable pessimism. The

trouble with such an explanation is that it does not take into consideration the underlying conditions which bring about decisions for the curtailment of investment.

A sounder view than the irrational and unpredictable behaviour of the investor as the reason for curtailed investment is that the capitalist has over-invested as the result of faulty calculation on a continuance of the anticipated profit yield. In other words, he has entered into commitments which he would have avoided if he had known that changes in the profit rate were likely to occur. As a result, he will attempt to offset this situation as far as possible. Hence he seeks to adjust himself to the existing state of affairs in the only way practical, i.e. by an abrupt conversion of investment funds into holding money. It is only by holding capital in its liquid form—money—that the capitalist can make the necessary adjustments for both present and future activity. The stampede for liquidity preference at such times is not, as some economists think, a prime condition of crises, but merely a sign of an interruption of the productive mechanism peculiar to capitalism. As Marx says: "On the eve of the crisis the bourgeois with the self-sufficiency that springs from intoxicating prosperity declares money to be a vain imagination. Commodities alone are money. But now the cry goes up, money is alone a commodity! As the hart pants after water, so pants his soul after money, the only form of wealth" (Capital, Vol. I, p. 115).

Rate of Profit

It is true that one can speak of this type of crisis as one of over-production, but the genesis of such a crisis lies in the fact that it is over-production of capital which expresses itself in the fact that the volume of investment seeking profitable employment is in conflict with the maintenance of previous profit levels. Again to quote Marx: "There is periodically a production of too many means of production and necessities of life to permit of their serving as means for the exploitation of the labourers at a certain rate of profit". Marx goes on to say: "It is not a fact that too much wealth is produced. But it is true to say that there is periodically over-production of wealth in its capitalist and self-contradictory form... The capitalist mode of production for this reason meets with barriers at a certain scale of production which would be inadequate under different conditions. It comes to a standstill determined by the production and realisation of profit, not by the satisfaction of social needs" (Capital, Vol. III, p. 303).

E.W.

THE MYTH OF BLOOD

In the "Socialist Standard" for May, 1954, Comrade "S.H." holds forth on the subject of Race. To the astonishment of this reader it seems that neither the author of the article nor, we presume, the editorial committee of the S.P.G.B. is fully acquainted with the facts of life, at least on the question of *blood* and its connection or rather its complete lack of connection with heredity.

Should we be wrong about this, the only other conclusion we can arrive at is that both Comrade S.H. and the editorial committee should be more careful about the words they cause to appear in a scientific socialist journal.

Let us get down to specifics: in the second column of the first page of the article in question (p. 76), third paragraph, appears the following statement:

"The fact is that man's wanderings over the earth have promoted such a *mixture of blood* that there is no such thing nowadays, even in remote places, as genuine blood purity."

Ye gods and little fish-hooks! Do the comrades responsible for writing and editing this article not know that Blood is Blood and that outside of the different blood types or groups and the so-called Rh factor (which have nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that man has wandered over the face of the earth and intermarried with his fellows of all types and stocks), there is no difference between the blood of one person and another? As Professor Ashley Montague so well puts it:

"The character of the blood of all human beings is determined not by their membership in any group or nation, but by the fact that they are human being" (p. 216, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth*, Harper).

To be even more specific. There is no such thing as a *blood* relationship or connection by *blood*. The embryo in the mother's womb manufactures its own blood within the placenta independently of the mother's blood stream and there is no connection between the two blood streams. So we see that blood has no connection with heredity and certainly does not become "*mixed*" because of intermarriage between the so-called races of mankind. This incidentally is indeed rather fortunate, as most of us would certainly have become slightly dead before we had a chance to live, because of having blood of different agglutinating

properties and different Rh factors mixed. For even within a single family the groupings are generally different. So we can say that the blood of a "half-breed", a "quadroon", an "octoroon" or for that matter the blood of any of us human mongrels is not now, nor has it ever been in all human history and pre-history any different because of this so-called racial impurity.

In this connection, we can assure the most die-hard opponents of "racial mixture" such as we have in the Southern United States or their equally misinformed counterparts in South Africa, that they need have no qualms whatsoever about accepting blood transfusions from negroes, Chinese or Eskimos; that their sole possible worry could be that the blood injected into their veins is of the correct grouping. The fact that such qualms do exist and that even the American Red Cross segregated blood according to "race" during the Second World War is just one more proof of the utter ignorance that stalks the world even in our scientific times.

Such an attitude becomes even more ridiculous when one considers that the same people who refuse transfusions from humans of a different "race" will permit themselves to be inoculated and vaccinated with serums manufactured from the blood of horses, monkeys, etc.

No, one does not look to "blood", but to the genes in the chromosomes for the answer to how physical characteristics are transmitted. An even if one desired to accept the Lysenko theory which seeks to contradict that generally held by most of the world's scientists, there would still be nothing whatsoever to say for blood as a medium of transmitting characteristics throughout the human family.

At this point, I anticipate that some of the comrades who have read thus far will accuse me of being a quibbler, a splitter of hairs and of accusing Comrade S.H. and the S.S. editorial committee of something for which they are not guilty. Let me hasten to point out that if the comrade had been guilty of using the offending expression only in this one instance I would probably take the attitude that it was an unintentional slip and something not worthy to be challenged. But alas! we read further in the same paragraph:

"A name may be carried down for generations, but the blood associations of that name through the female side are beyond calculation."

Which would seem to indicate that the author seems to think that there is some sort of *blood* connection between mother and child, contrary to all scientific information.

Furthermore, towards the end of the next paragraph:

"But Aryan is a language and *not* a blood connection."

While some comrades may disagree, I think the comrades who are responsible for the writing and editing (or lack of editing) of the *Myth of Race* have definitely prove themselves to be in the clutches of the *Myth of Blood*.

And just one parting shot. The comrade ends his effort on the following note:

"It may perhaps be as well to add in conclusion that we all use the word "race" loosely for want of better terms. This does little harm as long as prejudice is not tied to it."

I would respectfully like to point out that there is something much more important than lack of prejudice and that is a *scientific understanding* of the lack of any rhyme or reason for the concepts most people have of the subject.

Even those who do not *tie prejudice* to the use of the word are for the most part either uninformed or misinformed as to the question of "race". It will take much more than lack of prejudice or toleration among the "races" to wipe out this dangerous myth. It will take, rather, a little mental effort on the part of the working class in particular to realise that the only race so far as mankind is concerned is the human race or *species*. That differences of skin colouring have nothing to do with blood and are only skin-deep. That whatever other differences that exist, as for example in cranial measurements, shape of nose or slant of eyes, are just as meaningless.

So far as the workers are concerned, these artificial divisions within our species must be recognized as completely unimportant and the *real* division of society into economic classes must be understood as the only issue worth getting worked up over. But care in the use of language *can* play a considerable part in bringing socialism a little more quickly, and those of us who speak and write for socialism should definitely watch our facts and our words.

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Correspondence and articles should be sent to FORUM, S.P.G.B., 52, Clapham High St., London, S.W. 4. Subscriptions 12 months, 7/6d, 6 months 3/9d. Cheques and P.O.'s should be made payable to: E. Lake, S.P.G.B.

SOME MORE PROBLEMS OF PROPAGANDA

Action Please, Comrades!

Comrade S.R.P. seems singularly worried about a supposed lack of jobs within the S.P.G.B. to keep members occupied and "make them feel wanted" (see "Problems of Propaganda", June FORUM). Yet I doubt very much if this is truly the case.

Speaking, writing, clerical and committee work, and literature canvassing are but some of the jobs which our organisation offers its members and which sadly lack the necessary support to make them a success. Comrade Parker should rest assured that whatever the reason for people's failure to come forward and take up these tasks, it certainly does *not* lie in an absence of "being wanted" by the Party.

Further, this silly idea should be scotched, that the individual member is somehow separate from the Party as a whole. The S.P. is a collection of individuals and should work as an integrated whole. We cannot rely on intellectually immature men and women whose main concern when signing their forms "A" is "to be wanted" and who lapse into "post enrolment apathy" soon after joining our ranks (notwithstanding "bureaucratic and inconsiderate enrolment methods"—whatever that may mean).

About the hardest organisational job to-day is to get members to *work* for socialism. It is well known that the proportion of active members is small (no more than about 25%, I think) and new hands to help are always more than welcome. I have yet to meet the active party member who has ever done anything to discourage new entrants from playing as full a role as possible. The reverse is true.

As an example of the difficulty of arousing the members from their slumbers, take the committee with which I am associated, namely

the H/O Literature Canvassing Committee. Our title may suggest to some people that we canvass as a body, but this is only partially true. Most of our time so far has been spent in *encouraging* (note that word, S.R.P.) members and branches to indulge in this very worthwhile activity. Yet a glance at our correspondence would show that reactions to our efforts range from lack of enthusiasm to actual scepticism and even mild hostility. We do our best to make personal contact—to make comrades "feel wanted" in this work (as indeed they certainly are), and meet with a multitude of evasions and excuses.

My committee will continue with their attempts, of course, in spite of the sometimes painful silence which greets our innocent enquiries. It is hoped to inaugurate a large scale drive for September to step up the sales of the "Socialist Standard" for the anniversary publication, of which more elsewhere in this issue. Those persons suffering from the malady known as "post enrolment apathy" are therefore invited to try the following remedy: one canvass per week (preferably each Sunday morning) throughout the month of September. Even the poorest results so far achieved have been shown to be well worth the effort involved, and we are always prepared to give active assistance to anyone sufficiently interested to desire our support.

Let none imagine that he will not be wanted should he come forward. He has our guarantee of a warm and comradely greeting with open arms, and the assurance of a rich reward. I refer, of course, to the satisfaction in the knowledge of a valuable job well done. We can offer no more than that.

E. T. CRITCHFIELD

(for H/O Literature Canvassing Committee)